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Amendments to the Claims

Please cancel Claims 1-17 and 20. Please amend Claim 18. Please add new Claims 21-36. The Claim Listing below will replace all prior versions of the claims in the application:

Claim Listing

1-17. (Canceled)

18. (Amended) ★ An automated method of staining a biological specimen with a histological stain, wherein the specimen is treated by a process that includes treatment with a corrosive reagent, the process comprising the step of:

dispensing from independent liquid dispensers, onto the specimen, precursors of the corrosive reagent, wherein the liquid dispensers include at least one part fabricated from a material incompatible with the corrosive reagent and wherein the precursors are less corrosive to the material than is the corrosive reagent,

whereby the precursors combine *in situ* to form the corrosive reagent, thereby treating the specimen.

19. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 18, wherein the material is a plastic material.

20. (Canceled)

21. (New) A method of staining a biological specimen with a histological stain, wherein the specimen is treated by a process that includes treatment with a corrosive reagent, the process comprising the steps of:

- (a) dispensing onto a biological specimen an oxidizer that is a precursor of the corrosive reagent; and
- (b) dispensing onto the biological specimen an acid source of hydrogen ions that is other than the corrosive reagent, wherein the acid source of hydrogen ions is selected from the group consisting of perchloric acid, perbromic acid and nitric acid,

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whereby the oxidizer combines with hydrogen ions and the combination of oxidizer and hydrogen ions contacts the biological specimen, thereby treating the biological specimen with the corrosive reagent.

22. (New) The method of Claim 21 wherein the histological stain is performed by an automated histological staining instrument.
23. (New) The method of Claim 21 wherein the histological stain detects or characterizes microorganisms.
24. (New) The method of Claim 21 wherein the histological stain includes a Grocott's modification of Gomori's methenamine silver method.
25. (New) The method of Claim 21 wherein the acid source of hydrogen ions is perchloric acid.
26. (New) The method of Claim 21 wherein the oxidizer is a source of chromate ions.
27. (New) The method of Claim 26 wherein the source of chromate ions is selected from the group consisting of sodium chromate and potassium chromate.
28. (New) The method of Claim 21 wherein the oxidier and hydrogen ions form chromic acid in contact with the biological specimen.
29. (New) A method for detecting the presence or absence of microorganisms in a biological specimen in an automated histological staining process, comprising the steps of:
 - (a) treating the biological specimen with a staining reagent wherein the treatment comprises dispensing from separate liquid dispensers, onto the biological specimen, a source of chromate ions and an acid source of hydrogen ions, the source of chromate ions and the acid source of hydrogen ions being other than chromic acid, and wherein the acid source of hydrogen ions is selected from the group consisting of perchloric acid, perbromic acid and nitric acid, thereby

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- combining chromate ions and hydrogen ions, wherein the combination of chromate ions and hydrogen ions contacts the biological specimen;
- (b) washing the combination of chromate ions and hydrogen ions from the specimen;
 - (c) staining the washed specimen with a histological stain suitable for the detection of microorganisms; and,
 - (d) detecting the presence or absence of microorganisms in the specimen.
30. (New) The method of Claim 29 wherein the automated histological staining process includes a Grocott's modification of Gomori's methenamine silver method.
31. (New) The method of Claim 29 wherein the acid source of hydrogen ions is perchloric acid.
32. (New) The method of Claim 29 wherein the source of chromate ions is selected from the group consisting of sodium chromate and potassium chromate.
33. (New) The method of Claim 29 wherein the chromate ions and hydrogen ions form chromic acid in contact with the biological specimen.
34. (New) A method of staining a biological specimen in an automated histological staining procedure, wherein the biological specimen is treated by a process comprising the steps of:
- (a) combining a source of chromate ions and an acid source of hydrogen ions, wherein said source of chromate ions and said acid source of hydrogen ions are other than chromic acid, and wherein the acid source of hydrogen ions is selected from the group consisting of perchloric acid, perbromic acid and nitric acid; and
 - (b) contacting the combination of (a) with the biological specimen, thereby treating the biological specimen.
35. The method of Claim 34 wherein the chromate ions and hydrogen ions form chromic acid.

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36. (New) The method of Claim 21, wherein the oxidizer and hydrogen ions react in situ to form the corrosive reagent.